

Removing the Mask

Living the Real Life of God in the Real World

Matthew 5:14-16 “...in the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven.”

Halloween Christianity

We are in the season of Halloween, where children and adults alike will all romp around the neighborhoods in costume, on a quest for something fun and wonderful. This is probably the only time when neighbors and strangers will open their doors to people they cannot recognize because of the masks, to praise them for their costumes and give them the treats the holiday brings.

In some respects, we present Christianity to the world in the same way: with masks and costumes. Dressing it up to make it look desirable (or at least what we think is desirable), or even worse, dressing up ourselves to make us presentable to the world, so that they will accept Christianity. True, Jesus did say “he who receives you, receives Me”, but what is it about *you* that really draws people to Jesus? Success? Charisma? A good sales pitch? And how long does that last in people’s lives?

What is Good? Good deeds defined

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven – Matthew 5:16

It would be nice if there was a specific list of good deeds - things that would ensure that we were getting it right. As it is, our lists of deeds are influenced by our religion, political status, upbringing, books we read, etc. For some, good deeds are spiritual gifts that wow the audience. Others tout social justice. Being nice and friendly are the choice of some. Note, that these are **our choices**. The problem with our choices is that they typically lead back to us, and to people’s acceptance of us, rather than pointing the way to God. For us, good works means that we are acceptable to people. Good works means that they like **us**, and therefore must like God.

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your Name, and in your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers’. – Matthew 7:21-23

- How can these deeds be considered bad?
- Were the deeds themselves bad, or was there something else being considered?

Evildoers defined: οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν – is translated as, “those who practice lawlessness”. These were people who were doing good works, but they did not have the foundation or proper motivation for doing them, and as such, to Jesus were doing evil. The focus for those doing the works was themselves, and their ability to access the kingdom because of their actions. For Jesus, however, these individuals had failed to take into account the relationship with the King. The works, for Jesus, were a byproduct of the relationship.

If the works would not draw the doer to Jesus, why would they draw the audience to Jesus?

Seeing Behind the Mask

Jesus had several encounters with those who presented a good game, and were even revered for their actions when it came to their faith.

At dawn He appeared again in the temple courts, where all of the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ – John 8:2-5

On the surface, their actions would seem reputable. They used the right words, quoted the right scripture, even sought to take the right action according to the Law. Jesus, however saw behind the façade, and confronted their real intention:

If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her – John 8:7

We can accept people at Halloween coming to our doors in costume, because we know they are in costume. We know there is a real person underneath who is not what they are portraying. Witches, goblins and ghouls are nothing more than little kids who play in the neighborhood.

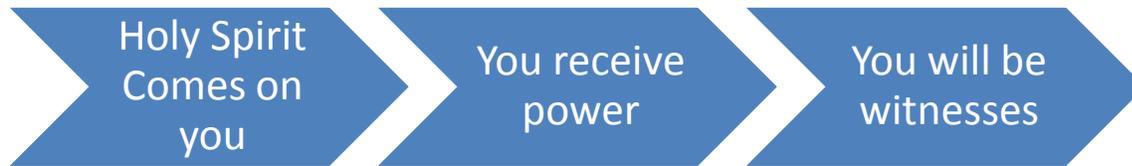
Similarly, when we face the world with our masks, the world first asks “who is it under the mask?” They see an agenda that does not fit the presentation. Just like someone who flatters to get the sale, often times our Christianity is presented with all the love and caring in the world, yet the real intent is clearly seen by the world.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, you are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life...

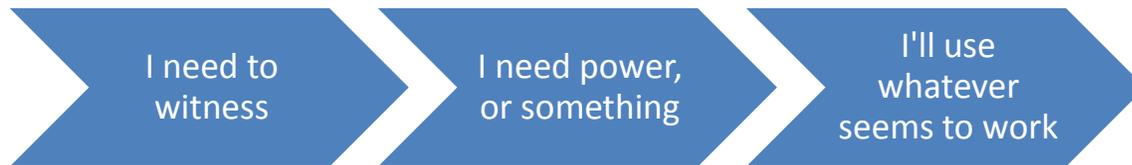
So they said to him, ‘what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?... – John 6:25-30 (they proved His point)

Living Whole in the Holy

When we think the goal for our Christian life is to just try to work at getting people in, we miss the point, and we miss the real power of God that changes lives.



God's focus and method



Human focus and method

For God, our witness is an outgrowth of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

Some, however, made fun of them and said "They have had too much wine". Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd..." – Acts 2:13-14

On the day of Pentecost, Peter had not been prepared to speak to anyone, let alone a crowd. However, coming out of the experience of the presence of God, he spoke and 3000 were converted that day.

It was the presence of God and the knowledge of who he was dealing with that prompted Peter to speak with the confidence and power he did. Peter was not trying to manufacture a good experience for people to accept (it was actually just the opposite). It was God that convicted those that were converted

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ... He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God – Micah 6:6-8

Our witness and activity for God comes through our constant relationship with Him. Jesus modeled this in his time on earth:

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him. – John 8:28-29

What Is Our Light?

Jesus said to let our light shine in such a way that:

- 1) People see our good works
- 2) They praise our Father

Jesus focus was not on the works, but on the light. He had just told them that they were the light, and that a lit candle makes no sense to be under a bowl, but is always placed on its stand *so that it can give light to the entire house.*

Our light is who we are, who He has made us to be, who we are in Him. It is our knowledge of who He is, and the relationship we have with Him that gives meaning to the deeds we do. It is when we get in touch with the heart of God through relationship, and share that same heart with the world that they praise our Father.